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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000298

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SUBJECT: IRELAND'S LISBON II CAMPAIGN - OFF AND RUNNING

REF: A. DUBLIN 220

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Classified By: DCM Robert Faucher for reasons 1.4 b and d

#### Summary and Background

11. (C) With just under two months to go before the second Lisbon Treaty referendum (Lisbon II) both the "yes" and "no" campaigns have kicked off. All major parties, unions, and business groups are expected to be firmly in the "yes" camp, and early polls have projected that Lisbon II will pass with a comfortable majority. The "no" campaign is comprised of a motley crew of disparate interests, with Socialist MEP Joe Higgins as the unofficial leader. Both sides contend that the margin of victory is likely to be much tighter than expected, and that the outcome will depend upon financing, ability to adapt a central message to television and radio, cooperation between the myriad of parties on each side of the campaign, impact of the government's recent performance, continued interest on the part of previous "no" voters, and ability of unions to affect their members' positions. End Summary

#### Financing

12. (C) Lisbon II (scheduled for October 2) will likely feature a campaign that is very different to Lisbon I. Following heated local and European Parliament elections on June 5, the major parties have heavily depleted war chests. The Green Party and Sinn Fein suffered severe electoral setbacks and are likely to face the greatest financial difficulty in campaigning. Further, on July 14, Mark Garrett of the Labour Party confirmed that Labour's coffers are insufficient to wage a major campaign. On July 22, PolOff spoke with Eoin O'Briain of Sinn Fein, who indicated that their strategy in campaigning against the treaty would primarily consist of individual outreach and canvassing. On July 21, MEP Joe Higgins informed Poloff that he would not spend money on the campaign but that he believed that appearances on radio and television programs would provide the no campaign with sufficient opportunities to reach the electorate (Note: current interpretation of Irish law mandates that both sides of a referendum be given equal air time in the media). While the Department of Foreign Affairs has led the educational efforts for the government, developing and producing informational materials, it is legally unable to advocate for the treaty.

#### Organization

13. (C) Despite significant media attention, neither the "yes" nor the "no" campaigns are well-organized at this point. On July 14, Poloff spoke with Lucinda Creighton, leader of Fine Gael's pro-Lisbon efforts. Creighton commented that while Fianna Fail had claimed to be well along on the Lisbon

campaign, it had not yet involved the other major parties nor had it shown any evidence of its organization in terms of materials. She added that she didn't expect to see much of an effort before September. Garrett confirmed that Labour had not been involved at all in Fianna Fail's planning to date. Both Garrett and Creighton stated that this is in part intentional as they believe a fragmented campaign may diffuse arguments that the yes campaign is "elitist" or "preachy." Likewise, in the absence of Declan Ganley and Libertas, the "no" campaign is suffering from a lack of organization. At present, each group working against the treaty is content to go it alone and, particularly in the case of the socialists and Sinn Fein, none are eager to cooperate with those on the opposite end of the political spectrum.

#### Media

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14. (C) In last year's campaign, the "yes" side quickly found themselves on the defensive, focusing on arcane points rather than the big picture. Both Creighton and Garrett predicted that if the message in September is anything other than "Ireland needs the EU," the "no" campaign will be victorious. While both cautioned against "scaremongering" the major parties are convinced that there will be strong repercussions if Ireland votes against Lisbon in October. Further, there will be much more emphasis on grooming TDs and local party members to "carry the water" in the rural constituencies. All of the major parties indicated that unprepared representatives hurt the campaign in 2008. While Sinn Fein remains opposed to the treaty, its rationale is slightly more nuanced than during the first referendum. O'Briain expressed that the guarantees offered nothing other than a clarification of the treaty's text and that the real issue is in raising awareness about what the EU hopes to accomplish with the enhanced efficiency from the treaty. Further, Sinn

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Fein is confident that a two tier system is possible and that regardless of the outcome of the referendum, Ireland will remain a part of the EU. However, O'Briain remains skeptical that that message can translate easily to a brief soundbyte.

#### The Government

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15. (C) All those on the "yes" campaign expressed concern that the referendum would be seen as a referendum on the current government and not on the Lisbon Treaty. Creighton stated that if the tone of the debate moves from the EU's role in lifting Ireland out of the recession to the government's role in the economic crisis, the treaty would most certainly be defeated. However, O'Briain counseled that the economic downturn would lead more from the 2008 "no" camp to support Lisbon II as a last resort. Regardless, the treaty is generally seen as a "must-win" for the ruling coalition. Both Fine Gael and Labour suggested that a defeat would lead to a general election prior to 2012.

#### Youth Voters

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16. (C) During the 2008 referendum, youths comprised a sizable portion of no voters. As they did not identify directly with Libertas, the religious right, or the socialists, they remain one of the greatest unknowns in the 2009 campaign. Higgins stated that despite heavy campaigning and media attention, younger voters were not Libertas supporters. Contrary to the position of the main party, Young Labour has opposed the treaty. However, conversations with individuals from this demographic indicate that they believe approval is inevitable. O'Briain fears that these voters will become more apathetic and turn out in far smaller numbers than they did last summer.

#### Farmers and Unions

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17. (C) Each party commented that firm, early declarations of support from farmers and labor unions would be key for the

"yes" campaign. Neither were strong supporters in 2008, and over 60% of Labour party members (who are closely aligned with the unions) voted against the treaty. While the farmers' union, realizing that its members' survival depends on continued EU subsidies, has publicly announced its support for the treaty, organized labor has been more cautious. On July 8, Labour leader Eamon Gilmore addressed to Irish Congress of Trade Unions annual conference, stating that the Lisbon Treaty would introduce a legal right to collective bargaining for Irish workers. While the major unions are expected to eventually join the "yes" campaign, the speed with which they will do so remains in question.

Comment

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¶8. (C) The 2009 campaign, thus far, appears to be stalled. Ireland is generally fatigued from the combined effects of the local elections and the succession of tax hikes and spending cuts proposed by the government. It is too soon to tell whether the August break will reinvigorate the electorate and the campaign, but a low turnout would most certainly favor the "yes" side. The campaign is further highlighting discontent among the back benchers, and both Dermot Ahern and Micheal Martin are said to be positioning themselves as the next Taoiseach. If the government is not successful in pushing the Lisbon through, it is likely that Fianna Fail could see a change in leadership following the December budget.

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